

Our Exciting Solar Neighborhood!

What Is the Solar System?

Our solar system is an exciting place! The solar system is made up of all the planets that go around our Sun. The solar system is also made up of moons, comets, asteroids, dust and gas. Our solar system is a tiny part of the whole universe, but it is the place we call home. It is our huge neighborhood.

Who Are Our Neighbors in Our Solar Neighborhood?

For many years, we learned that there are nine planets in the solar system. Not anymore. In 2006, a group of astronomers, scientists who study

space, decided that Pluto was no longer a planet. They chose to call it a “dwarf planet.”

So here are the eight planets plus our newest dwarf!

Mercury

Mercury is the closest planet to the Sun, so it is very hot. It is very small and spins slowly. Mercury has no moons.

Venus

Venus is almost the same size as Earth, the planet we live on. Scientists call Venus our sister planet. Like Earth, Venus has volcanoes, mountains, and valleys. But Venus has thick clouds in its sky. The clouds trap the Sun’s heat and make it too hot for living things. Venus has no moons.

Earth

There is no place like home! Earth is the biggest planet found in the inner solar system. The temperature, weather, and surface of Earth make it just right to keep us alive. Earth looks like a giant blue marble from space. Earth has one moon named Luna.

Mars

Mars is smaller than Earth. Scientists think that Mars once had rivers, streams, lakes, and even an ocean. Today, all of the water on Mars



is frozen. Mars has much higher mountains and far deeper canyons than Earth. Mars has two moons.

Jupiter

Jupiter is the largest planet in our solar system. It has a big red spot where a large storm has been raging for 300 years! Jupiter spins very fast. It only takes 10 hours to go from night to day on Jupiter. Jupiter has 28 moons!

Saturn

Saturn is bigger than Earth. It has several hundred rings. Many people think that these rings make Saturn beautiful. With 30 moons, Saturn has the most moons of any planet.

Uranus

Uranus is very odd because it spins on its side. Scientists think that many years ago, a very large object smashed into Uranus and changed the direction of its spin. Scientists think Uranus has a large water ocean under its clouds. Uranus has 21 moons.

Neptune

Like Jupiter, Neptune has a giant storm. This storm is called the Great Dark Spot. Like Uranus, Neptune has a very large water ocean under its clouds. Neptune has six rings that circle the planet. Neptune has eight moons.

Pluto: A Dwarf Planet

Pluto is called a dwarf planet because it is so small. In fact, Pluto is smaller than all of the other planets and even smaller than many of the moons in the solar system! Pluto is so far away that no satellites have ever been there, so we don't know a whole lot about it. We do know that it is very cold and very dark and has one moon named Charon.

Scientists voted to call Pluto a dwarf planet because it was really more of a small, round icy object with an orbit that is different from other planets. Astronomers expect that they will find many more dwarf planets in the solar system in the future. Some scientists are unhappy, however, that Pluto is no longer considered a planet. Many astronomers didn't get a chance to vote. Who knows? They might have voted to keep Pluto a planet. What do you think?

